

Local Historian Publishes New Book on the Kring Family

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Local historian, Dale C. Maley, was aware of some of the history of the Kring family in Fairbury. He was aware they operated a vast greenhouse complex, just west of the Prairie Central High School. He was also aware the Kring family operated a foundry. This foundry made cast iron decorative doorway columns for several Fairbury businesses.

Maley has also been searching for photos of Fairbury citizens in their Civil War uniforms. He recently discovered an 1863 photograph of John Kring in his Civil War uniform. This last discovery prompted him to research the family thoroughly. He used the results of this research to write his new Fairbury history book titled ***The Kring Family of Fairbury, Illinois.***

In 1856, one year before the city of Fairbury was founded, John Kring Senior and his wife Rachel Smith moved their family from Ohio to the Fairbury area. Four of their seven children and their families also relocated to the Fairbury area.

In 1850, Congress passed a new law granting land to Military veterans, including veterans of the War of 1812. Most veterans did not want to move to Illinois, so they sold their land patents to farmers who did want to move to Illinois.

John Kring Sr. obtained 320 acres of land just north of Fairbury. He got this land by purchasing government land warrants issued to two military veterans. He also bought 40 acres from the government for \$2.50 an acre.

John Kring Sr. and his wife Rachel became founding members of the Methodist church in Fairbury. A few years after he moved to Fairbury, John Kring Sr. and his son went to Chicago using his \$600 carriage. This carriage would be worth about \$16,000 in today's dollars. While they were in Chicago, someone offered him 120 acres in trade for his carriage. John Kring Sr. looked at the land, but it was under-water. He decided he preferred the Central Illinois prairie better. This under-water land later became part of downtown Chicago worth millions of dollars!

In his new book, Maley then explores the lives of the four children that moved from Ohio to the Fairbury area.

Son George Washington Kring became a blacksmith and a builder of farm equipment. He received two U.S. patents for farm equipment. One patent was for a field cultivator. The second patent was for a cornrow check planter.

To use a check row corn planter, the farmer would lay down a rope or steel cable with knots about every 30 inches. The farmer would then run the horse-drawn planter down

the field, with the knotted rope running through the planter. Each knot in the rope would trip a mechanism on the planter, which then planted a corn seed. At the end of the row, the farmer had to pull the stakes and move the rope over one increment.

Some Fairbury farmers noted that George Washington Kring forgot to patent the most critical part of his invention, the knotted rope!

Maley was able to use the old Sanborn Insurance maps to identify the location of the Kring blacksmith shop. It was located just west of Dave's Supermarket.

Son Henry Kring farmed a few years in the Fairbury area, before moving his family to Nebraska.

Son John Kring Jr. enlisted with the 3rd Cavalry Company K in the Civil War. He came back to Fairbury after the Civil War ended. Two of his sons ran the Kring greenhouse complex for 40 years until it closed in 1942.

The Kring greenhouse complex was huge. It had an 82-foot tall brick chimney. The tall chimney was hit by lightning three times during the 40-year life of the greenhouse. Each lightning bolt would blow out huge chunks of brick from the chimney.

The huge greenhouse boiler also heated three nearby homes using steam. Two of the houses belonged to the two Kring brothers that ran the greenhouses. The third home was the Thomas A. Beach home on Hickory Street. This home is often called the Lion house, because of the two concrete lions in the front yard. When the greenhouse closed in 1942, those three homes had to find their own heating furnaces.

One of the two sons that ran the greenhouse recounted a story that his grandfather, John Kring, Sr. told him. When his father John Kring Jr. went off to fight in the Civil War, his grandfather had to take over farming their land. During the Civil War, what is now Locust Street (commonly called Main Street), was just a wheat field!

The third son of John Kring Jr. started out working on the TP&W railroad. He worked his way up to telegraph operator in Fairbury. He was then promoted and moved to the main office in Peoria. He eventually rose to the Manager responsible for setting shipping rates. He worked for the TP&W 50 years.

The last of John Kring Sr.'s sons was Lafayette Miller Kring. He ran the Kring Foundry from about 1876 until 1903. The Fairbury foundry continued to operate until 1909, when it was converted to the Klondyke Carriage company building.

If you walk down Main Street in Fairbury, many buildings have decorative vertical trim pieces on the sides of the doorways. Most people assume these are wood pieces. If you rap on these pieces with your knuckles, you will find they are cast iron and not wood.

Maley walked the entire length of Locust or Main Street in Fairbury and found four buildings still have vertical columns made by the Fairbury Kring Foundry. The word Kring is cast into the bottom of these vertical columns.

Maley hopes this book will help people to better understand the critical role the Kring family played in Fairbury history. They were some of the early pioneers that helped Fairbury grow from only 269 people in the 1860 census to about 3,800 people today.

Maley donated printed copies of the new book to the Fairbury Dominy library, the Fairbury Echoes Museum, and the Pontiac library. Paper copies of his books can be purchased at the Walton Centre in Fairbury. You can also purchase Kindle e-books or conventional printed books from Amazon.com.



